

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 127

June 25, 1997, 4:12 pm
Page S-6316 Temp. Record

BALANCED BUDGET ACT/Immediate Home Health Care Transfer

SUBJECT: Balanced Budget Act of 1997 . . . S. 947. Kennedy motion to waive the Byrd rule of the Budget Act for the consideration of the Lautenberg (for Kennedy) amendment No. 504.

ACTION: MOTION REJECTED, 38-62

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 947, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, will make net mandatory spending reductions to achieve the savings necessary to balance the budget by 2002 and to provide the American people with tax relief. This bill is the first reconciliation bill that is required by H.Con. Res. 84, the Budget Resolution for fiscal year (FY) 1998 (see vote No. 92). The second bill will provide tax relief (see vote No. 160).

The Lautenberg (for Kennedy) amendment would immediately transfer that part of the home health care program that this bill will transfer over 7 years from Part A of Medicare to Part B. The premium would still be increased as though the transfer took place over 7 years, however. Individuals not enrolled in Part B would remain eligible for the transferred services for 2 years.

The amendment was offered after all debate time had expired. However, by unanimous consent, some debate was permitted. After debate, Senator Domenici raised the point of order that the amendment violated the Byrd rule of the Budget Act. Senator Kennedy then moved to waive the Budget Act for the consideration of the amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to waive favored the amendment; those opposing the motion to waive opposed the amendment.

NOTE: A three-fifths majority (60) vote is required to waive the Budget Act. Following the failure of the motion to waive, the point of order was upheld and the amendment thus fell.

Those favoring the motion to waive contended:

The Kennedy amendment, through a bookkeeping change, would extend the solvency of the Medicare Part A trust fund by 2 years. It would not cost senior citizens any money and it would not increase the deficit. All it would change is the account that would be

(See other side)

YEAS (38)		NAYS (62)			NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (0 or 0%)	Democrats (38 or 84%)	Republicans (55 or 100%)	Democrats (7 or 16%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Akaka	Inouye	Abraham	Hutchinson	Baucus		
Bingaman	Johnson	Allard	Hutchison	Biden		
Boxer	Kennedy	Ashcroft	Inhofe	Hollings		
Breaux	Kerry	Bennett	Jeffords	Kerrey		
Bryan	Landrieu	Bond	Kempthorne	Kohl		
Bumpers	Lautenberg	Brownback	Kyl	Moseley-Braun		
Byrd	Leahy	Burns	Lott	Moynihan		
Cleland	Levin	Campbell	Lugar			
Conrad	Lieberman	Chafee	Mack			
Daschle	Mikulski	Coats	McCain			
Dodd	Murray	Cochran	McConnell			
Dorgan	Reed	Collins	Murkowski			
Durbin	Reid	Coverdell	Nickles			
Feingold	Robb	Craig	Roberts			
Feinstein	Rockefeller	D'Amato	Roth			
Ford	Sarbanes	DeWine	Santorum			
Glenn	Torricelli	Domenici	Sessions			
Graham	Wellstone	Enzi	Shelby			
Harkin	Wyden	Faircloth	Smith, Bob			
		Frist	Smith, Gordon			
		Gorton	Snowe			
		Gramm	Specter			
		Grams	Stevens			
		Grassley	Thomas			
		Gregg	Thompson			
		Hagel	Thurmond			
		Hatch	Warner			
		Helms				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

drawn down to pay for home health service costs. Right now those costs are paid for out of the Part A trust fund. Because the Part A trust fund is comprised of Treasury notes, any notes redeemed take money out of the general fund of the Treasury. This bill will gradually transfer part of home health service costs to Part B of Medicare. Part B of Medicare is paid for directly out of the general fund. Thus, in both cases, the funds ultimately come out of the general fund, but in the second case the Part A trust fund is not depleted. Part B is partly paid for by program participants. They pay 25 percent of the costs; that money goes into the general fund. Under this bill, the premium will increase as the program is transferred. The Kennedy amendment would make the transfer immediate, but it would still phase in the premium increase as though the transfer were going to take 7 years. Thus, the Medicare Part A trust fund would not be drawn down, premiums would not increase any more rapidly, and the deficit would remain the same because, for deficit purposes, it does not matter if the money comes from Part A or Part B. We urge our colleagues to vote to waive the Budget Act for this sensible amendment.

Those opposing the motion to waive contended:

Medicare needs to be saved with real reforms, not bookkeeping gimmicks. The "reform" advocated by the Kennedy amendment is simply to shift the burden to the taxpayers. In 1998, the taxpayers would have to pick up 100 percent of the cost shift. Why not take our dear colleague's logic a step further and transfer all of Medicare Part A to Part B and not increase the premium? Then Part A would stay solvent forever because no money would ever be removed, and unlimited services could be provided at no cost to senior citizens (though at a very high cost to the taxpayers). It seems as though our colleague just does not believe that Medicare is paid for by people putting money into the trust fund throughout their working lives to pay for their medical needs when they retire. Apparently he thinks the Part A trust fund is just a bookkeeping gimmick. We do not. In this bill we do not violate the traditional means of paying for Medicare. Those home health care services that are transferred to Part B will be paid for the same way that other Part B services are paid for, with beneficiaries paying 25 percent of the premium. The burden will not be put solely on the taxpayers. To keep the premium from rising too rapidly, the services will be transferred gradually. To the extent that they are still provided from Part A, the Part A trust fund will be drawn down. This solution is fair. We urge Senators to support the bill language. The Kennedy gimmick should be rejected.